

Introduction

Welcome to the Drawing Course. I have been teaching drawing, painting and illustration for many years, from beginners to degree level and have learned many many things from my students. Firstly, everyone genuinely wishes to be better at what they do, creatively.

And that the desire to produce good quality artwork is real and valid. And I have seen, through trial and error, that the quickest way to reach your own personal goals is to start at the beginning. It is not painful, it is not a punishment, it is joyful and possibly even something of a relief. So when you use the word

Beginner, don't think of it as 'dunce' (which too many students do!), think of it as I do, as meaning, Beginning. So (and this is so exciting!), welcome to the Beginning of your Drawing Course. There is a lot to read, and lots of suggestions to guide you in your thinking, there are exercises to practice and more to send to me for crit. Let your attitude be open. Let your mind be a clean slate. What you will discover is that drawing may not be what you think, that there is more to it than just the objects in front of you (there is also composition, placement, light and shade, angle, contrasts, and on and on), you will learn to consider for more than you expect at this stage, and feel in a much surer position to continue your learning into painting. I always recommend that students choose a broad path, before specializing in a particular subject – the more you know about all aspects, the better your skills will be, before you go down one particular path over another. For example, I know of one student who wanted to draw dogs. She became wonderful at drawing dogs, but couldn't do anything else - and was so good at dogs that she was afraid to try anything else. This is a shame, and so easily avoided, by trying dogs and cats and buildings and faces and landscapes and flowers and birds and....everything. Because at some point, she may wish to paint a dog sitting next to a cat and a man, in a garden with a house in the background and a hint of landscape over the fence...

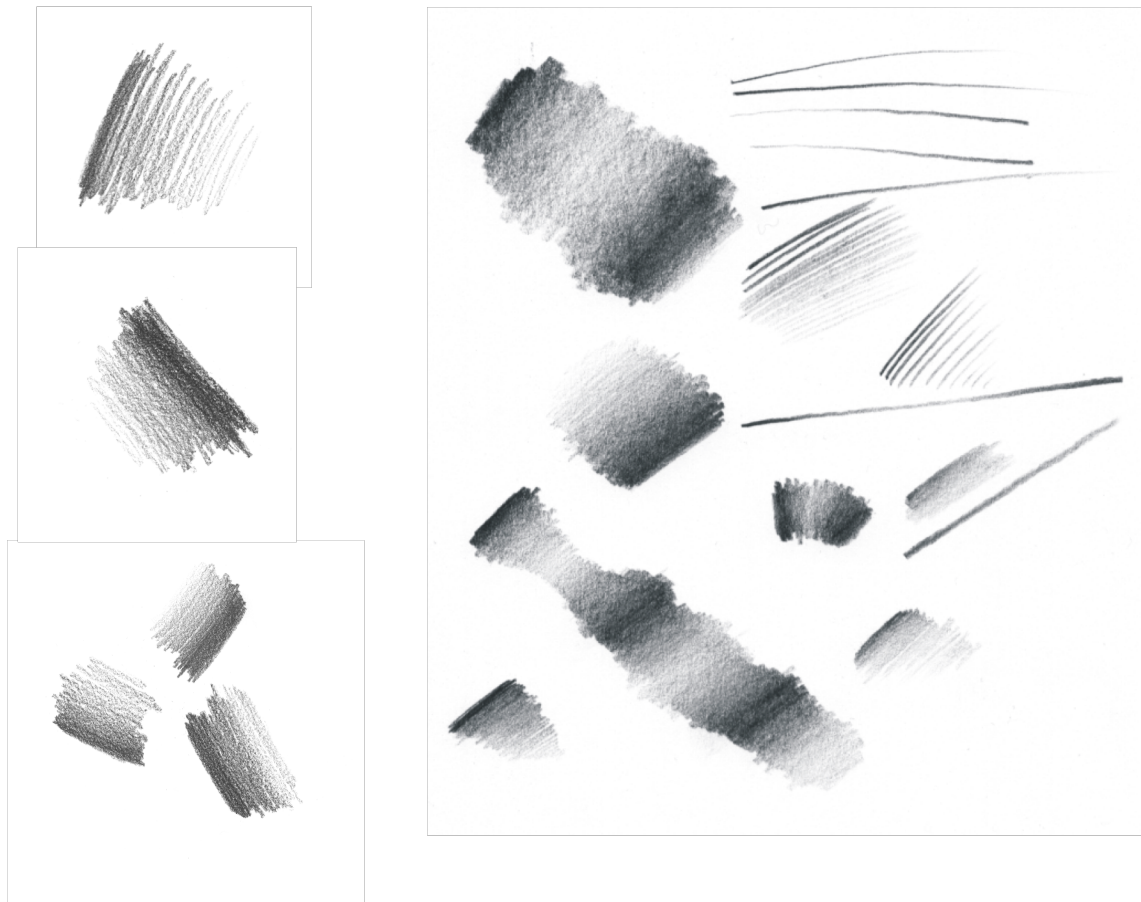
I am delighted to be your tutor and am happy to share this beginning to your journey, enjoy the exercises, ask me lots of questions, please look on the college forum to share your work and see the work of other students - it is so good to share in this way, and students can talk to each other, ask questions and contribute answers, providing you with a network of like-minded people who struggle and strive and achieve - just like you will. Remember too, the more drawing you do - a little bit every day is perfect - the better your progress. Expect a lot from yourself, don't be unkind but don't be too soft either. Strive. And remember too that the secret to great paintings is the great drawing underneath. Observing all things around you, from the rain drop on the window to the curve of a leaf, really looking and enjoying shapes, will contribute more to your abilities than copying anything ever will. Please work from life, rather than photographs, unless the exercise asks you otherwise. Draw freehand - trust your eye. (I trust your eye!) And finally, remember you are learning, and I don't expect every artwork to be a masterpiece - yet!

TONES USING PENCIL AND COLOURED PENCIL

So, how do we create many different tones with our pencils? The answer lies in the pressure applied to the pencil. Pressing down hard on the pencil obviously results in a bold dark line, lighten the pressure and you get a light delicate line. Try this yourself. Using either a pencil or a coloured pencil, draw a dark line and then draw other lines alongside, gradually releasing the pressure until you can go no lighter. Now draw one continuous line. Start the line by using a lot of pressure and draw the line while gradually releasing the pressure, until there is in fact no pressure and the pencil leaves the paper.

Finally, hold the pencil in the 'flat position'. Begin with a very dark area; you will probably need to go over this a few times to build up the tone. Work the pencil across the page, once again gradually releasing the pressure. During this shading exercise your pencil should not leave the paper. The result should be a graduated tone from dark to light with many tones in between. It is important to practice this until the graduation is even, and there are no stops and starts.

Try shading graduated tones using the other methods of holding the pencil. Experiment with tones; try covering a large area with a single tone with one pressure. Practice going from light to dark and back again. You can see from my scribbles below that this simple pressure technique can create quite convincing forms. Notice how the light areas appear to bulge forward whereas the dark areas recede.



Beginners' Drawing

So while your initial drawing will be a line drawing, the aim is to apply plenty of charcoal and spread it around with your finger. This gives you a variety of shades of grey, instant tone which you can darken by applying more charcoal, or lighten by using an eraser or a cleaner finger! Tones are lovely and smoky.



By Julie Douglas

Cover large areas using the side of the stick. The best surface to begin with is sugar paper or Ingres paper. These have 'tooth' which will hold the charcoal.

If dense black is needed the area can be spread with fixative before using the charcoal or use compressed charcoal. A fixative will be needed when the drawing is complete to stop it smudging.

Drawings in charcoal are easier from an upright angle than a flat surface - the dust can fall away without causing problems. A good idea is to put newspaper on the floor beneath you to catch the dust.

Remember charcoal sits lightly on the paper - rough surfaced paper will stick a little better - but the pleasure and ease of moving charcoal on the surface with fingers, putty erasers, water on cotton balls means that it will continue moving when the picture is complete if you don't use a spray fixative and store your work carefully.

While charcoal is more commonly used on dry paper, it is possible to use it with a wet wash too. You need to use water colour paper to do this, as water colour paper is designed with a series of pools in the paper, dips to hold water and allow it to dry into the surface. Smooth papers don't have this so the paper will buckle if you wet them.

Use watercolour paper with charcoal and perhaps highlight your picture with chalk.